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DEPARTMENT FOR H, PLEASE PASS TO CONGRESSMAN MCGOVERN

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SUBJECT: REPRESENTATIVE MCGOVERN MEETS WITH DEFENSE  
MINISTER SANTOS

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos told Representative James McGovern (D-MA) on March 4 that the Justice and Peace Law was an example of security advances under Uribe, but voiced concerns that revelations of para-political ties would be viewed negatively by the U.S. Congress. Santos explained security concerns on Venezuela and Ecuador, but said Colombia would not be drawn into a regional arms race. Santos also highlighted advances by the military in human rights; McGovern stressed the need for U.S. aid to be more focused on socio-economic initiatives and institution-building. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 4, McGovern met with Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos, Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo, and Vice Minister of Defense Juan Carlos Pinzon. Also attending the meeting were McGovern's Legislative Director Cindy Buhl, Program Director for the Center for International Policy Adam Issacon, Political Counselor John Creamer, and Political Officer Kevin Murakami (notetaker).

MOD SANTOS PRAISES JUSTICE AND PEACE LAW  
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¶3. (SBU) Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos said the Justice and Peace (J&P) Law process was an example of the success of President Uribe's democratic security policy. As recently as three years ago, public debate over whether or not to televise the voluntary confessions (version libre) of 58 paramilitary leaders would have been "unthinkable." Santos conceded the J&P Law was a controversial issue - heavily discussed and criticized in Colombia's Congress. He rejected criticism that the law was too lenient, stressing that paramilitary chiefs entered the process voluntarily. He added that ELN members had rejected the J&P demobilization terms as too harsh.

PARA-POLITICO SCANDAL  
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¶4. (SBU) Santos said recent revelations of politicians' and legislators' ties to paramilitaries were proof that democratic institutions were working. He said the magnitude of these revelations was due to Uribe's policies, not in spite of them. Santos pointed out that although most of the politicians currently accused of paramilitary ties were Uribe

supporters, the President consistently called for the harshest application of the law against them. Santos said para-political ties must continue to be revealed, regardless of who is implicated, but worried the U.S. Congress would negatively perceive what the Colombian government considered a "traumatic, but necessary" step in the demobilization process.

#### MOD COMMITTED TO FIGHTING NEWLY EMERGING CRIMINAL GROUPS =====

15. (SBU) Santos expressed concern over ex-paramilitaries' participation in emerging criminal groups, estimating there were 26 such bands. He said fighting them was a top priority. Military and police forces had captured 970 members of these criminal groups and killed 130. Santos receives OAS reports on paramilitary recidivism and ties between the military, police, and ex-paramilitaries. He stressed his commitment to break such links, explaining he had dismissed 15 police and military officers suspected of collaborating with emerging criminal groups.

#### OTHER MOD ADVANCES ON HUMAN RIGHTS =====

16. (SBU) Santos said one of his key objectives as minister was for human rights to become a "non-issue" with the military. He had made significant progress toward this goal by appointing a civilian to head the Military Penal Justice System and assigning a legal adviser to review every combat flight by the Colombian Air Force. He also emphasized that any allegation of a human rights violation by military personnel is investigated and prosecuted in civilian courts.

17. (SBU) Santos and Vice MOD Sergio Jaramillo highlighted increased investment and a stronger climate of trust between the military and local citizens in San Jose de Apartado peace community. In one of the peace communities, Santos explained, members were now allowing medical personnel to enter to provide health services, whereas before they had rejected all such services. McGovern recognized these advances as positive steps. Santos said the GOC would boost the police by 20,000 and the military by 18,000 over the next four years to improve security in areas where human rights violations by the FARC and ELN regularly occur.

#### CONCERNS OVER VENEZUELA AND ECUADOR =====

18. (SBU) Santos said he was concerned with developments in Venezuela, but acknowledged the GOC would have to tread carefully with President Chavez. He was worried about drug-trafficking routes and cocaine processing labs in Venezuela, as well as Chavez's arms build up. He said Chavez was also financing "extremist" political movements in Colombia. Vice MOD Sergio Jaramillo said Chavez was encouraging strikes by trade unions and providing them financial backing, especially in Tolima and Valle de Cauca Departments. Jaramillo also said Chavez was financing the radical arm of the CRIC, one of Colombia's largest Indigenous umbrella groups. Still, Santos stressed the importance of not confronting Chavez. Santos said, "We depend a lot on trade with Venezuela," He also stressed that "Colombia would not be drawn into a regional arms race." Santos said Ecuador was portraying Colombia as its primary external threat. He explained that President Correa, in casting Colombia as a threat, was replicating Venezuela's approach to the United States.

#### DEBATE ON PLAN COLOMBIA =====

19. (SBU) McGovern said Plan Colombia should include more emphasis on socio-economic development and institution building, and suggested there would be increased debate over the merits of military assistance in the new U.S. Congress.

He had just visited a community of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and said little had changed since his last visit there in 2003. He recounted hearing the same complaints of chronic poverty, lack of basic services, and presence of illegal armed actors. Left unattended, McGovern asserted, the IDP problem could quickly become a security one. The MOD and his vice ministers agreed on the importance of providing social services and building institutions. This was the goal of the military's "clear and hold" strategy of first eliminating illegal armed groups and illicit crops, so that democratic institutions could flourish safely.

FTA  
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¶10. (SBU) Santos stressed the importance of both Plan Colombia and the FTA to ensure economic growth and strengthen democracy. McGovern said the FTA would be subject to a "rough" debate in the U.S. Congress, but said he did not believe U.S.-Colombian relations hinged on ratification of the FTA.

¶11. (U) Representative McGovern did not clear this message.  
Drucker